

We have to get serious if we want to protect this Nation's infrastructure.

SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENT COMMISSION ON WAR WITH IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, I have come to the floor, once again tonight, to discuss the groundswell of support for an independent commission to discuss the administration's plans regarding Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. After hearing the administration's case for war, many Americans felt they were led to believe that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction ready to use against America and were on the verge of developing nuclear weapons. Mr. Speaker, we may yet find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, but it is now clear to many Americans that the administration overstated and misrepresented the threat that Iraq posed to the United States. Those Americans can say it better than I can.

Fred, from Ventura, California writes, "I recently read an article that summarized the comments made by the President and members of his administration. I am deeply troubled by how incongruent these statements are with the realities after President Bush declared an end to hostilities."

□ 1700

Susan from Solana Beach, California, compares the administration's untruths with recent corporate scandals, "Enough is enough. Whatever deceptions corporate America perpetrated in the last few years, no one died and we continue to investigate. Washington must be held to a far higher standard because American lives were risked and lost on the word of the Bush administration. Without an investigation to answer these important questions about potential distortion of intelligence reports, all the tax cuts in the world will not buy my vote in future elections."

Steve from Bakersfield was more understanding: "If we launch a preemptive war by mistake, God help America."

This is not God's responsibility, Mr. Speaker. It is the Congress's responsibility.

Beatrice from Redondo Beach is upset with those of us here in Congress: "I am angry at the lack of action by our representatives against this Bush administration on their manipulation of facts in order to take our country to war."

J. Lawrence of California seconds that and I will quote him: "Of all things that a government does, the decision to go to war must be made openly and without manipulations. I urge you to support an independent commission to investigate the circumstances surrounding what we, the public, were told about the justification for our re-

cent incursion into Iraq. We spent millions on a sexual dalliance but appear to have been ignoring what may have been a mass deception and manipulation of truth that in the end put U.S. citizens and soldiers in harm's way."

Stan and Sue from Sierra Madre support an investigation also. They say: "Never should we harm another country nor put our own sons and daughters in harm's way under false pretenses. An inquiry is one of the tools to make sure this does not happen in the future."

Mr. Speaker, other Americans want to remind us, in the Congress, that they do not care about partisanship. They only care about getting to the truth.

Steve from Moorpark writes: "In the interest of preserving the freedoms and liberties inherent to our Constitution, I ask you to support an independent investigation of the Bush administration's distortion of evidence of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction program. No matter which political party affiliation any American favors, it is detrimental to our country, our Constitution, and our democracy to have our leaders mislead all Americans for reasons yet unknown."

It is time to get the facts. I urge all of my colleagues to support H.R. 2625, the gentleman from California's (Mr. WAXMAN) bill to create an independent commission to uncover all of the facts about the administration's claims and Iraq's weapons. It is time for Congress to stop beating around the bush and take action. Support fact finding. Support an independent commission.

HONORING REED LARSON

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Colorado (Mrs. MUSGRAVE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MUSGRAVE. Mr. Speaker, it was nearly 5 decades ago in the spring of 1954 that Reed Larson went on what he believed to be a temporary leave from his job as an engineer for the Coleman Company in Wichita, Kansas, in order to lead a new grass-roots advocacy group called Kansans For Right to Work. Larson and his group members were determined to pass a State right-to-work law protecting employees from being forced to join or pay dues to a labor union in order to get or keep a job.

Because they first had to deal with a hostile Governor, the job took longer than originally expected. By the time Kansas's right-to-work law was finally passed in November of 1958, Larson had been on temporary leave from the Coleman Company for 4½ years. After the Kansas victory, Larson was quickly recruited to lead the then 4-year-old national Right to Work Committee from its headquarters right here in our Nation's Capital and his temporary leave from the Coleman Company became permanent.

For the next 44 years Larson stood at the helm of this organization, which has aptly been hailed as the Nation's preeminent defender of workers' freedom. I rise today to pay tribute to Reed Larson because of his long, selfless commitment to the right-to-work cause and because late last month at Mr. Larson's own recommendation, the board of directors of National Right to Work Committee appointed then executive vice president Mark Mix as the new Right to Work president and Larson as executive committee chairman.

Reed Larson is still fighting for the right-to-work cause, but his role in the coming years will be in a different capacity than during the last 5 decades, marking the end of an era for the National Right to Work Committee and for opponents of forced unionism nationwide.

Mr. Speaker, I have the utmost respect for Mr. Larson's continued involvement with the right-to-work cause. Almost anyone else who had accomplished what Reed Larson has over the past 49 years would be content to rest on his laurels. During the 1950s, roughly 30 percent of private sector employees nationwide were forced to join and remain in a union. If they refused, they would be fired. Today it is 7 percent of private sector employees who are compelled to pay union dues or fees in order to keep their jobs. One major reason it is now possible to envision the day when every American private sector employee enjoys the personal freedom to decide whether or not to affiliate with the union is the invaluable assistance Reed Larson and the National Right to Work Committee has given to State right-to-work efforts.

Thanks largely to the sound advice of Reed Larson and the committee, the number of State right-to-work laws has grown to 22, with the most recent law being approved less than 2 years ago in the State of Oklahoma. Furthermore, not a single right-to-work law that was in effect when Mr. Larson took over the committee in January of 1959 has been repealed or rendered inoperative through court action, although Big Labor has spent countless millions of dollars on bids to destroy such laws.

The most notorious of these schemes was union officials' Capitol Hill campaign to eviscerate all State right-to-work laws through repeal of Taft-Hartley section 14(b) in 1965 and 1966. Under Reed Larson's leadership the committee saved State right-to-work protections by convincing Senate minority leader Everett Dirksen of Illinois to lead a filibuster against 14(b) repeal.

Mr. Speaker, I proudly salute my good friend Reed Larson and the National Right to Work Committee's 2.2 million members. I applaud their unwavering dedication and tireless action on what should be every American's birthright, not to be forced to pay tribute to a labor union in order to get or keep a job.